Strategies of Public Intellectual Engagement

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Abstract: This introduction to the Special Section on public intellectual engagement has three objectives. First, to explore the different meanings that the polysemic term 'strategy' can hold in relation to intellectuals. In the process, we showcase both this concept's potential theoretical yield and its capacity to bridge the 'performative' and event-oriented study of intellectuals more common in English-speaking sociology with *longue-durée* career-oriented analyses more associated with French sociology. Second, to reassess some of the main contributions to the sociology of intellectuals by reference to this notion of ′strategy′, especially concerning issues of political allegiance and group membership. The final objective is to illustrate the potential of this approach in empirical work on intellectual engagement and introduce the papers that comprise the Special Section.

In recent decades a seeming paradox has marred the sociology of intellectuals. Parallel to the rise of the so-called 'knowledge society' (Bell, 1980) and a growing demand for expertise in political decision-making and public debate, many scholars have claimed that intellectuals are increasingly side-lined from public discourse and lost much of their prestige and authority (Jacoby, 1987; Fuller, 2004; Posner, 2009). According to this view, intellectuals have become ever more cloistered in institutions like universities and, in place of the iconic public intellectuals of the 20th Century – Sartre, Foucault, Russell, or those who survive them: Chomsky, Habermas, etc. – a plethora of more media-savvy actors seemingly less enamoured with universal knowledge (pundits, lobbyists, social media personalities, etc.) have taken over the public agora. This unease

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with the ostensible decline of public intellectuals is also apparent in the common complaint that academia – a traditional redoubt for intellectual life – has become biased and disconnected from the rest of society (Gross, 2013). Such accounts have only become more ubiquitous since the emergence of what has been called 'post-truth' politics, the growing sense of a 'tyranny of experts,' and the mounting curtailment that academics have recently faced in countries such as Hungary, Brazil, India, and Turkey.

As a response to this diagnosis, many have pleaded for a renewed sense of purpose for intellectuals. Michael Burawoy's (2005) call for a public sociology is a seminal example of this. Yet recently, some sociologists – especially in the English-speaking world – have argued that it is not necessarily the case that intellectuals have disappeared, but that the sources of their legitimacy and modes of public engagement have changed (e.g., Eyal & Buchholz, 2009; Baert and Booth, 2012). This new movement towards focusing on how intellectuals engage with their audience through their 'public interventions' has elicited a shift in focus: from what intellectuals *are* (e.g., a class, a normative ideal) towards what they *do* (e.g., their accomplished actions, the media they employ, the performances they act out). This shift in the subject of analysis opens the space for new actors to be considered intellectuals – polemicists, think-tankers, NGO advocates, industry experts, journalists (Osborne, 2004; Jacobs & Townsley, 2013; Tchilingirian, 2018; Gonzalez Hernando, 2019) – and for new ways of conceptualising what their work consists of. In the process, these authors have emphasised intellectuals' 'performance,' how their 'interventions' and 'products' circulate, and how these 'position' their producers (Baert & Morgan, 2017). From this perspective, being an 'anti-intellectual intellectual' is perfectly possible, since the definition of who counts as an intellectual rests on their production of public interventions rather than on any inherent trait, orientation, or status.

In an effort to develop these theories further, this Special Section focuses on the concept of 'strategy' as it applies to public intellectuals, which implies a starting position, resources, constraints, goals, and agency. The impetus for this was a shared intuition that this notion could cast a light on important aspects of how intellectuals act that are often absent in current sociological work on this topic, especially concerning how their trajectories evolve in contexts of rapid social change. Rather than proposing another comprehensive, self-contained concept to act as a skeleton key to decipher public intellectuals' role and status, we were instead motivated to use the term as

a bridge between different traditions. Our aim has not been to create an artificial coherence between these traditions, but instead to use the tensions that the word strategy conjures – between structure and agency, context and action, collaboration and competition, and improvisation and planning – as a way of putting different perspectives into conversation with one another. An important aspect of this has been asking how, for instance, 'strategy' might be used to explain both discrete acts of intellectual 'performance' (e.g. Morgan & Baert, 2017; Morgan, 2018), their iterative evolution over time (e.g. Brahimi & Brisson, 2020; Leperlier, 2020; Perez, 2020), and their long-term effects (e.g. Hauchecorne, 2020). Given the apparent current crisis of intellectuals' epistemic authority, theorising how such social actors adapt their activity to a changing and unpredictable environment is now more important than ever.

More specifically, this Special Section aims to connect sociologists of intellectuals hailing from both the French and English-speaking worlds, who have hitherto had little contact. In the contemporary French sociology of intellectuals, Pierre Bourdieu's perspective and methods play a central role in theorising how structure and agency interact to inform practice (Wacquant, 2005: 316). Bourdieu's toolkit has thus formed a 'school,' so to speak, which also informs the historiography on the topic (e.g., Charle, 1990). In contrast, in Anglophone approaches, Bourdieu's theory is most commonly employed on an *ad-hoc* basis or alongside other approaches. In this literature, there exists a growing emphasis on the agency of intellectuals (variously understood), an increased focus on reception, and a growing interest in interstitial spaces, valuation practices, and positioning effects (Baert, 2005; Eyal, 2013; Alexander, 2016). Drawing from representatives of both milieus, this Special Section offers productive points of contact between these ways of thinking and promising avenues to move beyond the limitations of both traditions. Our aspiration has not been to search for theoretical purity or an overarching synthesis, but instead to use the tensions that exist between these perspectives to stimulate innovation, or at the very least, a clearer sense of the stakes involved in adopting the various positions we, as a group, hold. Ultimately, we believe that both these traditions will become enriched through mutual engagement.

The remainder of this introduction is divided into three sections. The first, clarifies how the sociological concept of 'strategy' emerged as a critique of Rational Choice Theory to inform Bourdieu's sociology of practice. The second, expands on the implications of using this concept *vis-à-vis* classical works in the sociology of intellectuals, particularly in relation to the question of

intellectuals' provenance and allegiances. The third section exemplifies the potential yield of this notion and presents the articles that comprise the Special Section.

'Strategy' in Sociology: From Choices to Investments

Though relatively uncommon in the sociology of intellectuals, the noun *strategy* and the adjective *strategic* have been deployed in several areas of sociology. Among the first and most influential traditions to have done so is Rational Choice Theory. Influenced by economics's view of human agency, this approach understands social reality as built up from individuals' utility-maximising actions following a logic of costs and benefits (Coleman, 1990). Social interactions are thus informed by *strategic* decisions, carried out in pursuit of goals (Elster, 1979). Rational Choice Theory examines the mechanisms that lead from individual action to macrosocial phenomena in this way but tends to neglect the variety of motivations and influences shaping human behaviour. Similarly, in the study of economic organisations, the term 'strategy' often refers to plans of action designed to meet long-term, broadly-conceived goals in the most efficient, benefit-maximising, and cost-minimising way (Friedberg, 1998; Crozier & Friedberg, 2014).

In sociologies of everyday life, 'strategy' has been used to describe disembodied power structures that produce objective and unified order, in contrast to the 'tactics' of the individual agents who navigate, circumvent, or subvert these structures. De Certeau (1984: 91-110) famously contrasted New York City, conceived at a *strategic* level as an integrated 'map' from the top of the World Trade Centre, compared to its conception by those who walk the city, and who *tactically* shortcut the grand schemas of its designers. Unlike the contributions to this Special Section, 'strategy' is here understood as somehow un-naturalistic, in opposition to social life as it is lived out at a more human scale.

We feel that narrowly instrumentalist views of 'strategy' – most evident in its verbal rendering *to strategise* – limits the concept's potential, by forcing it to neglect behaviour based on normative adherence or affect, assuming individuals' intentions and actors' access to the consequences of their own actions. Alongside Weber (2011) and Merton (1936), we stress that consequences are often unintended and unforeseeable. Moreover, the world of intellectuals is not only driven by personal interests but is also regulated by a symbolic economy which relies on such

things as collaboration, knowledge-exchange, and peer-recognition. In this world, the distinction between instrumental and value-driven action is never straightforward, and relationality and shifting allegiances upset simplistic models of the pursuit of individual gain. Indeed, in some ways intellectual life is the very struggle over the definition of what 'gain' itself consists of, over what should be considered *worthy* and hence what has *worth*.

Bourdieu's conception of strategy provides perhaps the most elaborated attempt to overcome some of these shortcomings. For him, strategy is a 'practical sense of things' acquired through socialisation (Lamaison, 1986). He first employed this notion with reference to his works in Algeria and his native village, Béarn (Bourdieu, 1963; 1964; 2002), and later advanced an understanding of practice that was neither entirely objectivist nor subjectivist (Bourdieu, 1977). In his view, strategies are, at a basic level, a set of practices executed by individuals or collectives seeking to preserve or improve their position within a given field. However, the context where these courses of action take place – and its implicit notions of worth – is not a given, but the result of struggle and disputation. In other words, the world in which Bourdieu's social actors act and 'strategise' is an unstable symbolic accomplishment of unpredictable interactions, saturated by what he calls 'misrecognition.' Closely related to *habitus*, 'strategies' involve the *habitus* reacting to an unstable social world in concrete circumstances (Lamaison, 1986). As such, strategies are not a type of praxis but what underpins praxis: the not-necessarily-fully-conscious string of decisions and actions that situate an actor within social fields (Potter, 2000). In this sense, strategies are at the same time ingrained (acquired through socialisation), everchanging (adaptable to changing circumstances), and relational (shaped by social fields) (Bourdieu, 1985).

Strategy, thus understood, is semantically close to an acquired 'investment', in the polysemic sense of interest, gamble, or stake, and from this meaning, the potential of Bourdieu's ideas for studying intellectual engagements becomes apparent. Some sociologists have already employed his approach in the field of literary studies, especially in France, and often through the use of prosopography. In their writings, 'strategy' has been used to disentangle the activities and trajectories of writers in evolving social circumstances (Grande, 1999; Poliak, 2006) and how they position themselves and are positioned through processes of intellectual consecration, such as the awarding of literary prizes (Ducas, 2014).

By contrast, the new performative theories of intellectual interventions coming from the English-speaking world have tended to sidestep the issue of how these interventions are criss-crossed with long-term 'investments' and 'stakes' beyond the direct background of a particular public intervention – concentrating mostly on providing synchronic snapshots rather than extended continuities and developments. Perhaps because of their active avoidance of theorising the intentions behind intellectual work, these accounts have tended to ignore some fo the more durable consequences of socialisation and how its effects manifest over time. We believe that acknowledging the effects of this socialisation on 'interventions' – alongside various other barriers to access that define the intellectual field (along the familiar sociological dimensions of class, 'race', ethnicity, gender, and so on) – helps account for the inherently unequal nature of intellectual success and reward. Certain significant emphases in Bourdieu's notion of *strategy* therefore promise to move beyond the immediate context of an action while paying due attention to unequal social contingency.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu's notion of strategy has its own shortcomings and blind spots, many stemming from his use of economic metaphors and cohering around the fact that it is perhaps not as immune to the economistic assumptions of utility as it claims to be. In a trenchant and wide-ranging critique of Bourdieu's theory of practice, Alexander (1995) argues that in spite of Bourdieu's insistent distancing of his conceptualisation of 'strategy' from rational choice, it is the notion of intentionality – rather than of rationality – that Bourdieu's concept of 'strategy' ultimately rejects. This means that Bourdieu ends up reproducing rational choice's reduction of action to 'crass calculation' (1995: 152-155) but covers this move by locating the motive for strategising in the unconscious. For Alexander, the notion of 'unconscious strategy' is 'theoretically oxymoronic' (*ibid*.: 153). Ultimately, Alexander concludes that Bourdieu's 'strategy' is haunted by an unshakeable economism, which denies any possibility of altruism and fails to recognise the variety of normative, affective, and symbolic influences upon social action.[1]

This critique also brings to light the different meanings the word strategy takes in English- and French-speaking sociology: where Alexander's critique links the term to rational action, this semantic connection is not so strong in French. By using the word, Bourdieu seeks to avoid a vision anchored only in structures while positioning the agency of social actors in relation to others' in a given social space. Another risk – which applies more to when *strategy* ends up equated

with the structuring dispositional elements of *habitus* – is a tendency for what Baert (2012) calls the 'sociological fallacy,' exaggerating the degree to which socialisation determines events. Finally, Dewerpe (1996) critiques Bourdieu's use of the term in its failing to distinguish individual from collective strategies and its under-theorisation of how strategies move outside their initial milieus and morph over time. In an attempt to avoid these potential pitfalls, some of the contributions to this special section have therefore draw more upon performance-based understanding of intellectual 'strategy.'

Despite its limitations, the papers in this Special Section are united in their attempt to use empirical cases to avoid reifying intellectual *strategies* as naturally existing entities in the minds of those who enact them. Many of the papers achieve this by bracketing the question of intentionality, seeing it both as impossible to ultimately verify and/or irrelevant to the theoretical work the concept is charged with undertaking. Instead, they study observable performances, identifiable resources, and trackable biographical trajectories, sometimes over the span of decades. In this sense, one of the main attractions of the notion is precisely the emphasis it puts on the intersection between action and trajectory – which is also, in a way, an attempt to bring together the more iterative, *performative* focus of the English-speaking literature with the more structure-bound and *longue durée* approach of much of French sociology in this area. In a nutshell, strategy provides a theoretical bridge to cross from observation of specific interventions to an account of how the accretion of these individual acts is built up into an historical trend.

Additionally, all the papers conceive of 'strategies' as relational. Whether authors deal with individual intellectuals or groups, their aim is to explain the social circumstances behind intellectual positioning and engagement, with a focus on specific contexts and actual social practices. Many of the contributors are also interested in uncovering how such interventions transcend national borders, aware that many influential analyses of intellectuals have thus far been limited by their methodological nationalism (Boschetti, 1985; Bourdieu, 1984; Gross, 2008).[2] By contrast – following the example of Lamont's (1987) classic study of Derrida's reception in the US – many of the papers gathered here show how the work of intellectuals not only travels across national boundaries in an incidental manner, but in many cases in fact relies upon this traversing for its success.

Contributors also interrogate the margins of freedom intellectuals possess to embark upon different forms of performance and intervention, under the conviction that the meaning intellectuals assign to their action is not entirely a function of their position in a field. One way of account for this within Bourdieu's own theoretical framework, is through seeing action as shaped by a 'cleft habitus', in other words, understanding how dispositions towards thinking, feeling, and acting acquired in different social worlds clash with one another (Bourdieu, 2000). In this framework, gaps between different habitus, and between habitus and field, not only create barriers, tensions, and unease, but can also function as an engine of innovation and occasionally accrue advantage to those subject to them. Whether or not one adopts this approach, focusing upon such mismatches helps illustrate the importance of foregrounding the conditions of possibility underlying intellectuals' trajectories across social contexts and over time. Some of the papers in the Special Section also expand on how these ideas apply to marginal intellectuals who possess 'investments' that are different from those of their more mainstream contemporaries. On that note, our use of 'strategy' should be contrasted to the many *ex post facto* studies of intellectuals that take 'success' and dissemination as their starting point. Such studies tend to sample on the dependent variable. A strategy, by contrast, is a long-term course of action undertaken in a specific context and from a determinate position. Success is never guaranteed and nor should it be a precondition for sociologists' interest in this phenomenon.

In the next section, we reappraise some of the main theories in the sociology of intellectuals through the focus we have outlined. Even though we employ 'strategy' as a set of preoccupations and questions, rather than as a ready-made framework, we believe revisiting canonical literature on intellectuals through this notion can cast fresh light over how their allegiances and actions are enacted. After all, most of these works dwell at length over what constitutes 'intellectuals' as a social group, and hence were their 'investments' lie. For that reason, the analysis below stresses intellectuals' group membership, positions, stakes, and their fortunes over time and space.

The Investments of Intellectuals: From Groups to Practices

Although, as we have mentioned, the notion of strategy remains underdeveloped in the sociology of intellectual spaces (Posnock, 1989; Berg, 2016), the concerns it raises surface in many broader debates within the subfield. Here we summarise how the public engagements of

intellectuals have been conceptualised through three major approaches: genetic, generic, and those seeking to transcend the two. We show how different theoretical traditions have affected how 'strategy' might be conceived within this subfield. More particularly, we seek to illustrate what strategy can add to the study of intellectuals' agency, the structures within which they operate, and the changes they are able to initiate. Our focus on these seminal theories is based on our view that to understand intellectuals, it is imperative to examine the relationship between position, allegiance, and behaviour.

Much of the early scholarship in this area implicitly thought of intellectuals as a relatively homogenous social group, defined on the basis of shared characteristics or origin (Kurzman and Owen, 2002). This genus of substantive approaches we call *genetic*, where intellectuals are ascribed their status *qua* intellectuals on the basis of their social provenance. It is an approach tied to similar, though more nuanced, accounts that have identified intellectuals not as constituting a class, but as 'organically' tied to a given class or social group. According to these latter theories, intellectuals are agents that reflect the interests of a social collective on a symbolic plane.

This latter approach originates from Gramsci's work, which took particular interest in the role that intellectuals play in the cultural dimensions of political struggle (Gramsci, 1999[1971]). Deeply inspired by both Marx and Machiavelli, Gramsci suggested that for every social group that emerges out of the world of economic production, there are intellectuals who work towards assuring this group's solidity and leadership, not only in the economic sphere, but also in the political, social, and cultural ones. Establishing a distinction between a *traditional intelligentsia* which (according to him, incorrectly) thinks of itself as a class apart from the rest of society, Gramsci opposed those intellectuals that each class generates *organically*. Such organic intellectuals, whose primary role involves engagement in hegemonic struggles over defining what is to be taken as given in social and political relations, bear no necessary resemblance to the archetypal image of the universally-minded, publicly-engaged writers and artists bequeathed to us through Zola's rallying of the Dreyfusards at the end of the 19th Century (Collini, 2006: 15-44). Gramsci's account is therefore a type of '*genetic'* approach, since even though his organic *intelligentsia* does not constitute a distinct entity in its own right, their attitudes and practices are a function of their attachment to an economic class. Whilst recognising the profound consequences of socialisation and the acquired stakes that develop from occupying a particular position in social

space, the conception of strategy adopted in most of the papers that compose this Special Section is, by contrast, conceived more autonomously.

Others view intellectuals as forming a class-in-itself with specific properties. Lewis Coser, for instance, considered intellectuals, those who transcend immediate considerations to access a more general reality of meanings and values – a conception strongly linked to a vocational theory of what defines 'scientific' practice, driven by the putative pursuit of general truth (Coser, 1965: viii). For Coser, different scenes of historical interaction amongst intellectuals – literary salons, cafés, and scientific communities (*ibid*.: 19-35) – foster solidarity between their participants. The cohesiveness of an *intelligentsia* is thus understood as a function of its institutionalisation, whereby institutions are able to shield intellectual work from external pressures (*ibid*.: 7). Coser therefore thinks of intellectuals in '*generic'* terms, in which their public engagements are understood in relation to their belonging to a collective held together by shared preoccupations and interests, rather than by common social origins.

Alvin Gouldner's analysis closely follows Coser. However, while Coser emphasises intellectuals' shared ideal interests, Gouldner focuses on their 'material' ones, placing him somewhere between the ideal types of *generic* and *genetic*. His starting point is a critique of Marxism (Gouldner, 1979: 10). Despite intellectuals playing a significant role in political revolutions, Gouldner charges Marxist scholars with never systematically analysing them. The *intelligentsia*, for Gouldner, is a new and ascending social class, consisting mainly of the educated portion of the bourgeoisie (*ibid*.: 18) but not organically tied to the latter, or indeed any social class other than itself. On this basis, the role of intellectuals cannot be exclusively restricted to the production of ideologies, nor can their activity be ascribed to the domain of values. Instead, Gouldner divides the *intelligentsia* into: (i) those who prefer to resolve purely 'technical' issues; and (ii) those who aim to produce social criticism (*ibid*.: 48). According to Gouldner, therefore, the strategic behaviour of this new class, follows mainly the pursuit of its own interests, which may or may not coincide with the interests of its participants' class of origin.

A third group of scholars frames intellectuals' engagement as related to their environment, yet independent from their social class. Mannheim, for instance, synthesised what we have called the *generic* and the *genetic* by rejecting class determinism, instead claiming that intellectuals are

culturally defined (Mannheim, 1936: 60). Mannheim argued that whilst intellectuals' class background implies propinquity with particular ideas and interests, their public engagement is refracted in different ways depending on the context. Crucially, his theory grants intellectuals the capacity to employ tools and hold views that transcend the bounds of class interests. According to Mannheim, culture is the main connection between intellectuals. It is manifested through shared views over their own role and expresses the social link that unite different members of the *intelligentsia* (*ibid*.: 206). As social agents of culture, intellectuals carry with them the responsibility of the destiny of the whole society. In this sense, intellectuals would only fulfil their purpose if they abandon their allegiance to their social class and construct an autonomous role for themselves. From that viewpoint, the 'strategy' of intellectuals would lead them ideally to produce universalistic interventions, if grounded in their specific social position.

Randall Collins's characterisation of intellectuals is, in this respect at least, similar. Though his work is focused on establishing a global theory of intellectual change (Collins, 1998: 48), he builds an implicit model of who intellectuals are based around interactions that constitute communities (*ibid*.: 20). Collins suggests that the emergence and development of networks of thinkers offers an explanatory model which can be generalised to understand the dynamics of the intellectual world. For Collins, intellectuals produce decontextualised ideas with a degree of autonomy from their class position, and the success of these ideas comes from their being at the heart of 'ritual interactions'. It is in these repeated, ritual events (e.g., conferences, salons, debates, seminars, book launches, etc.) that the networks which underlie the political positions and dispositions of intellectuals are forged. The arguments of Mannheim and Collins draw together '*generic'* and *'genetic'* analyses of intellectuals, recognising the influence of both internal and external factors in intellectuals' engagements and political leanings – though they arguably still uphold strong boundaries between 'intellectuals' and the rest.

During the first half of the 20th century, similar approaches that understood intellectuals as a more or less an identifiable group dominated analysis. However, from the 1960s, historical sociology emerged and the concept of 'field', famously developed by Bourdieu, became central. While studies based on the notion of an intellectual class restricted themselves to outlining its common characteristics, historical sociology operated from a relational perspective distinct from the structuralism that preceded it (Bourdieu, 1966; Emirbayer, 1997). It was no longer a matter of

defining intellectuals in a substantive or normative manner, or of characterising them as a social group with homogenous attributes, but rather of understanding their behaviour in relation to other participants in the same social space and identifying the social differences that shaped how they engaged with each other. Intellectual strategies and action, thus, became chiefly individual rather than class-bound. The concept of 'field' also provided a framework for studying the influence of macro-sociological events (e.g., war, economic crises) over intellectuals. That is, the political position of cultural producers was no longer understood as an unmediated effect of social and economic factors. Rather, the concept of field placed the 'intellectual' in a specific social space whose degree of autonomy from external pressures varied over time and space (Sapiro, 1999; Lebaron, 2000; Matonti, 2005).

Many researchers working under the banner of historical sociology make use of the concept of field to situate intellectual production (Boschetti, 1985; Charle, 1990). Sapiro (2009), for instance, proposes a typology of the political engagements of French intellectuals. Drawing on Bourdieu, she sees the intellectual field as a space consisting of cultural producers competing to disseminate and legitimise their vision of the social world. Highlighting three dimensions of these intellectuals' political engagements: (i) symbolic capital; (ii) autonomy with respect to exterior demands; and (iii) degree of specialisation, she distinguishes between 'dominant' and 'dominated' based on the intellectual and public recognition they receive; between autonomous and heteronomous based on relative independence from the political world; and between specialists and generalists based on the type of knowledge they generate. This allows Sapiro to construct six ideal types of intellectuals, based upon their engagement: the Prince's Courtier, the Expert, the Avant-garde, Prophetic, Party, Specific, and Collective Intellectuals. In the sense of strategy that we have advanced here, what Sapiro's model allows for is a more subtle linking of social position to likely behaviour.

Another, more recent approach to the sociology of intellectuals, which draws upon the dramaturgical tradition in the social sciences, argues for the importance of analysing intellectual interventions as *performances* (Alexander, 2016; Baert & Morgan, 2017). Whilst not inherently incompatible with either contextual analyses of fields, nor accounts that tie intellectual work (organically or not) with the furthering of collective interests, it rejects the assumption of that competition over scarce forms of capital is always primary, as well as those of perspectives that rely on reifying 'interest' as an objective feature of the social world. Instead, such studies

emphasise the accomplishment of situated performances and places the performative strategies of cultural workers at the centre of analysis (e.g. Morgan & Baert, 2015). The success of an intellectual intervention, in this vision, becomes contingent upon the successful fusion of various 'elements of social performance' (Alexander, 2004). Advocates of this approach argue that it directs attention to the actual, empirically discernible devices that inform accomplished interventions, and that by including audiences and oppositional performers as significant players in any intellectual performance, it also retains the significance of relationality. Similar ideas inform the new sociology of intellectual interventions we mentioned earlier, which, rather than defining intellectuals through their presumed shared traits, focuses instead on their interventions (Eyal and Buchholz, 2010; Baert and Booth, 2012). In that sense, the concept of strategy we advanced earlier provides possibilities for bridging the Bourdieusian approach, which uncouples intellectuals' action from their belonging to an ostensible collective of intellectuals, and the performative turn, which analyses intellectuals in a way that avoids the pitfalls determinism.

Richard Posner (2003) proposed a further type of classification that shares some of the traits of the latter approaches. Seeking to explain US intellectuals' loss of influence in public debate,[3] Posner favours using the concept of 'market' rather than 'field.' For him, intellectuals' public contributions constitute a coherent space governed by the principles of supply and demand. Considering the specific nature of the product offered by intellectuals, this market remains an autonomous entity; it cannot intersect with other spaces of cultural production. According to Posner, the intellectual market responds to demand (Posner, 2003: 2), and the more an intellectual satisfies expectations, the more their renown increases. Posner does not focus on the sociological attributes of the participants in this market but rather on the circulation of their ideas and products in public space. He concludes that the US's intellectual arena is drowning in low-quality goods, with too many participants acting as intellectuals, and with the consequence that this group's influence and symbolic recognition has declined (see also Jacoby, 1987; Drezner, 2017). Although a notion of intellectual 'strategy', and its declining efficacy, can easily be distilled from Posner's arguments, most of the papers that make up this Special Section reject the simplification inherent reducing the intellectual universe, and its inherently normative and political nature, to a marketplace. Sociologists owe more to the complexity of our subjects than is granted through the importation of economic principles that sociology itself has time and again proven deficient.

Furthermore, as we shall explain in the following and final section, focusing purely on products at the expense of their provenance can risks dampening our understanding of the effects of intellectual interventions over a longer timeframe, both in relation to individuals' and groups' trajectories through social space, and concerning their broader societal effects.

Intellectual strategies: Theoretical and Analytical Issues

We would like to start this section with a contemporary example of the type of 'intellectual' that most classical authors in this field would have pushed beyond the boundaries of its object of study, but which current sociology has come to include in its purview: a British political consultant and commentator, Steve Hilton. The son of Hungarian refugees, Hilton went on to study at Oxford and began his career at the Conservative Party's Central Office in the late 1990s. There, he collaborated with reputed advertising agencies, helped shape the Conservatives' electoral strategy, and towards the end of the 2000s had become central in the party's 'modernisation' towards 'Compassionate Conservatism', a move towards social liberalism and away from traditionalist views on social issues such as same-sex marriage. He became David Cameron's Director of Strategy and was instrumental in turning Cameron's government towards adopting austerity policies after 2010. He left his post in 2012, after an altercation with civil servants where he argued government spending cuts should have gone even further, and then headed to Silicon Valley to become a technology entrepreneur. In 2016, he declared his support for Donald Trump, and in the following months became a frequent guest on Fox News. He now hosts his own show on Fox, in which he rails against government elites and 'experts'.

How should the sociology of intellectuals understand a case such as Hilton's? Difficulties immediately arise in trying to explain his behaviour through 'allegiances,' 'membership' to a group, or even his social position. Whilst focusing solely on his successive public interventions would highlight the positioning effects these prompted as his career unpredictably shifted from one stage to the next, one would be at a loss in trying to understand how the 'investments' underlying his behaviour affected his trajectory. How should we make sense of this trajectory? What were his 'investments' and strategies? How did he deploy them across time and space? We might quickly surmise that his strategies were shaped by changing contexts (the UK and the US; the dominance of modernising Conservatives at one moment, of rhetorically 'anti-elite'

Republican populists at another) and by a shared milieu in which performances that portray their authors as unorthodox and as challenging received wisdom and norms tend to be well received. Focusing either on position or effective action would not be enough to understand the development of his intellectual interventions over time. As we hope is borne out in the contributions to this Special Section, we believe that the notion of 'strategy' can help build a scaffolding for connecting the isolated performances in particular settings of figures such as Hilton, to the evolution of those performances across discrete moments, contexts, fields and geographical settings.

The papers of this Special Section pose questions concerning the public interventions of intellectuals that have so far only elicited sporadic and disjointed attention. Through deploying the notion of 'strategy' we aim to de-provincialise debates around understanding intellectual life, and bring into dialogue contributions from social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as from both early career and senior scholars, encompassing both historical and contemporary cases of both Western and non-Western intellectuals across Africa, Europe, and North America. Our contention is that the notion of 'strategy' allows for discussion of issues neglected in the preceding literature in this area. Contrary to *generic* approaches structured around the identification of social groups, and in continuity with Eyal's sociology of intellectual interventions, the study of strategies is not restricted to a substantive vision of intellectuals. This approach reveals its merits in addressing the manner in which intellectual participants adapt themselves to different contexts.

Pérez's (2020) paper, for instance, focuses on the case of Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad to provide an account of a transnational trajectory. He explains how Sayad's immigrant path and marginal position oriented his intellectual strategies (from his role in Algerian politics and society to his scientific and political engagement on behalf of Algerians in France). The author shows how the strategies Sayad used to engage in both national spaces – and his various roles as academic, expert, critical, and public sociologist – provided him with resources to build new intellectual alliances and inform his critiques of the state domination.

Innovating upon framing theory and more closely linked to cultural sociology, Marcus Morgan (2020) shows how this emphasis on position, intervention, and trajectory can offer significant insights into how movement intellectuals can avoid Leninist vanguard models of leadership through situated strategies that enable their leadership to be directly shaped by their

grassroots. Through an examination of the historical case of the intellectual leadership of the Black Consciousness Movement in apartheid South Africa, he demonstrates the mobilisation advantages that are conferred to movement intellectuals capable of deploying a diverse range of grounded strategies, drawing, for instance, from pedagogy and theology. This case study shows how using empirical reconstruction alongside the notion of 'strategy' can shift the analytic focus from what intellectuals are, towards what they do, and in the process profoundly alter our understanding of the role played by intellectuals in movement politics.

As alluded to above, many articles in this Section draw inspiration on the works of Bourdieu. It must however be noted that, in his own sociology of intellectuals, he used the concept of strategy only rarely. Moreover, Bourdieu's usage remained imprecise, failing, for instance, to differentiate between individual and collective strategic investment (Dewerpe, 1996). Based on this general framework, some of the authors of this Special Section have tried to enrich the Bourdieusian model by, for instance, focusing upon an aspect of intellectuals' careers he neglected: their traversing of national borders. One such study is Thomas Brisson and Amine Brahimi's (2020) which, similarly to Pérez, focusses on the transnational movement of an intellectual's career. Examining the case of Tariq Ramadan, they demonstrate the paradoxical positions and divergent reputations Ramadan held in different national contexts: acting in the UK as a modernist Islamic thinker closely connected to public authorities, while operating in France at the periphery of the political and academic worlds. The authors show how the transnational arena in which Ramadan's interventions took place shaped his intellectual strategy in ways that are illuminating of those who, like Ramadan, were socialised in 'in-between' spaces.

Tristan Leperlier's (2020) paper also uses the Bourdieusian notion of 'strategy.' Tracking the development of Algerian writers during the Algerian Civil War, he demonstrates the different sociological factors (primary socialisation, position in the field of literature, symbolic capital, etc.) that shaped the transition of the author Tahar Ouettar, from a proponent of the political far left, to eventually supporting Islamic militants. Leperlier's study of the Algerian literary field throughout the 'black decade' (1988-2003) not only refines what is meant by the intellectual field, but also demonstrates how Ouettar's earlier marginalisation in the literary field led him to progressively change his participation in the literary and political worlds throughout the civil war.

Intellectual strategies are also central to the study of public recognition. Also emphasising the significance of transnational engagement and continuing the development of Bourdieu's work, Matthieu Hauchecorne (2020) approaches this topic through an account of the introduction of the works of American philosopher John Rawls in French intellectual circles, analysing both the affiliations of the participants who imported his writings and how they employed his theory of justice. His article focuses on how the intellectual and political strategies of the authors responsible for introducing Rawls' work were shaped by their field positions.

The notion of strategy is also applied productively to the case of theoretical production by intellectuals. On this topic, José Luis Moreno Pestaña (2020) directs attention to the evolving works of Michel Foucault, comparing his analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* at two moments of his career, before and after his course on neoliberalism. In a similar manner, Lucile Dumont focuses on the strategies deployed within the French academic space to legitimise theoretical approaches to literary texts (semiology, semantics, structural analysis) in the 1960s. Her goal is to show how this dynamic mainly rests on the interventions of promoters outside of the academy. Such promotion allowed these French literary theorists to acquire legitimacy whilst bypassing the traditional institutionalised requirements for academic careers – which, even though far more embedded now than 50 to 60 years ago, still applied. Dumont's paper shows how strategies such as alignment with literary *avant-gardes* and investment in international networks, provide explanations for how this generation of literary theorists were able to gain symbolic status and institutional acceptance.

Maintaining a focus upon modes of public intervention, Gonzalez Hernando and Baert (2020) demonstrate the importance of shifting analytical attention towards the engagement rather than the characteristics of intellectuals. Such a move allows for the range of actors who might be construed as intellectuals to broaden considerably, so as to include various formal and informal organisations, networks, groupings, and other instances of collective agents. Gonzalez Hernando and Baert's paper illustrates this process through an account of the actions undertaken by intellectual collectives and the conditions under which some intellectuals are enabled to speak 'on behalf of' others, as well as addressing issues of accountability implicit in that relationship. From that point of view, strategies are construed as 'investments' that need not only pertain individuals, but also groups.

Kate Williams's (2020) contribution remains with the theme of relationality, drawing upon positioning theory to explore the role of 'expert knowledge' as it operates within the interstitial field of international development. Basing her argument on interviews and document data, Williams shows how sites of intellectual production that have thus far been treated separately are productively treated as related complexes, which share certain assumptions. Importantly, she demonstrates how each actor engages in intellectual strategies that position themselves in several contexts simultaneously, in order to meet the goal of producing knowledge that is relevant to academics, policymakers, and practitioners.

Ultimately, we hope that this Special Section prompts a dialogue across traditions in the sociology of intellectuals, drawing attention to the importance of understanding interventions and performances in relation to how they change over time (e.g. as a result of political crisis) and space (e.g. as they traverse national boundaries). The intervention of this Special Section could not be timelier, for in a world of proliferating intellectual claims and engagements, this subfield can hardly be considered worth its salt if it is unable to adequately make sense of figures like Steve Hilton.

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[1] DiMaggio (1979), Honneth (1986), and Alain Caillé (2008) offer similar critiques of Bourdieu's shifting economism (Silber, 2009), whilst Potter (2000) provides a defence.

[2] Bourdieu's late paper ''The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas'' was at the foundation of several studies on the international circulation of ideas (see Special Issue 145(5) (2002), *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*; Heilbron, Sora and Boncourt, 2018)

[3] For an overview of this debate, see Fleck (2016)